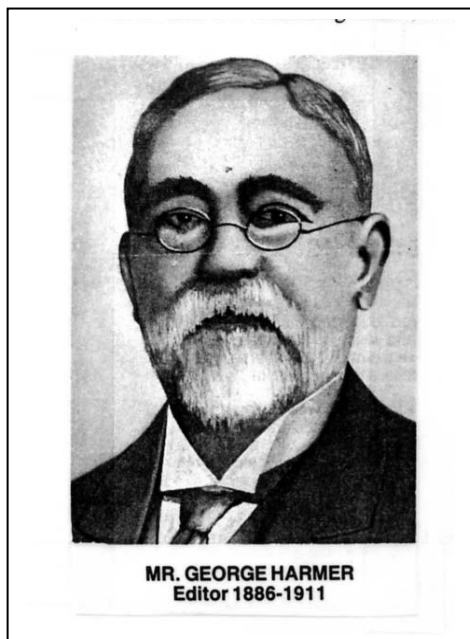


FIRST WITH THE NEWS IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Journalism seems to run in the genes of some Gloucestershire Harmers appearing on an extensive tree originating in Stroud. This is an account of several generations involved in journalism and printing in both Stroud and Cirencester and we are grateful to Joyce Sleet (nee Harmer) from Mandurah, West Australia as well as the current editor of the Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard for supplying much of the information.

Those with journalistic talents spring from Edward Harmer, Joyce's 4 X Great Grandfather. He married Mary Pitt in Stroud on 20 August 1727 and was in all probability a weaver. Currently Edward's parentage and date of birth have eluded us, but further research will no doubt reveal a link to the Randwick Tree. Edward's descendants are now spread far and wide, with HFA members in various parts of England and Wales as well as Canada and Australia. An abbreviated tree illustrating those referred to in the article appears on the next page.



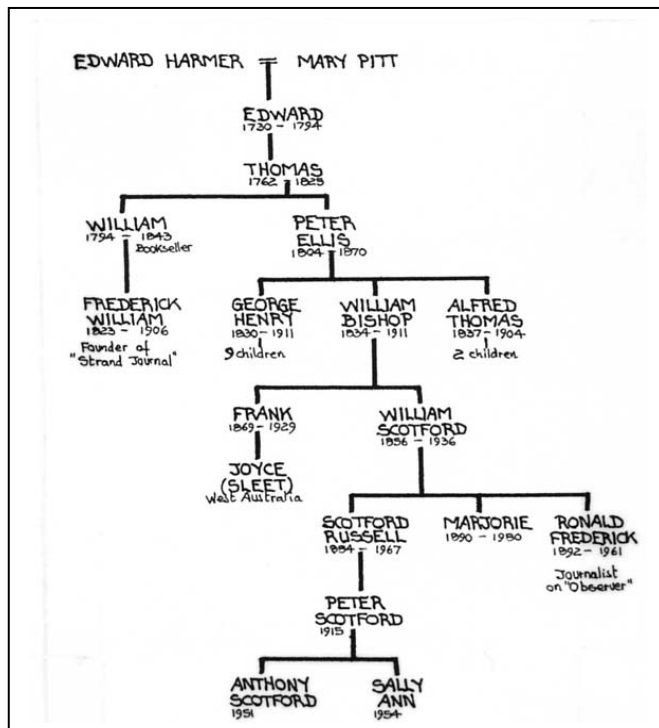
The first foray into the world of newspapers came about with Frederick William Harmer, great, great grandson of Edward. Frederick had followed in his father William's footsteps as a stationer and bookseller in George Street, Stroud and is believed to have been something of a radical thinker. He started The Stroud Journal in 1854 but his association was only brief as he sold out to a syndicate in 1857. The following year, due to mounting financial pressures, he left England with his wife and family of 7 to take up the life of a pioneer in Canada. However, a different branch of this family were to maintain a much longer association with another local newspaper, namely the Wiltshire and Gloucestershire Standard based in Cirencester.

George Henry Harmer was first engaged as reporter in 1851 when The Standard sold for two pence. In 1869 the paper was sold and under its new owner William Flux, it appeared as "printed and published by George Henry Harmer". In 1886, when the cost of the paper became one penny, George Harmer succeeded William

Flux as proprietor and paper continued under individual ownership until 1902 when the business was changed to a private family limited company with George Harmer as Chairman and Managing Director. George Harmer died in 1911, having given 60 of his 80 years in loyal and unwearied service to the paper.

George was succeeded as Chairman and Editor by his nephew (William) Scotford Harmer, who had been associated since boyhood with his uncle on the paper. The Standard continued to enjoy the able editorship of Scotford Harmer until his death in 1936, a period of between 25 and 26 years. He had, during this time, been given stalwart support by his cousin Albert Harmer, son of George Henry, as Assistant Editor. On the unexpected death of Albert in 1935 his place was taken by Thomas Boulton who had also been with the Standard since boyhood, and who, on Scotford Harmer's death was appointed Editor.

William Scotford Harmer's obituary supplied by The Standard bears many tributes from all sorts of local organisations and dignitaries from Cirencester Football Club, to the local MP who wrote in appreciative terms of the assistance he had received during 23 years representing the Division. Scotford was a member of the Urban District Council for 12 years and the Council Chairman spoke of him in the following terms:-



WILLIAM SCOTFORD HARMER

"Mr Scotford Harmer was a man of outstanding literary ability, a man who maintained in journalism and in his public life, a high standard of morality and outlook. It is impossible just at the moment to measure the loss we have actually sustained. He was our Chairman for nearly four years, and those of us who had the privilege of working with him and under him knew the value not only of his foresight but his great ability in drafting sometimes extremely difficult and technical letters and resolutions. We sadly missed him at the time of his resignation, but his influence, I feel sure, will carry on.

Mr Scotford Harmer, I always felt expressed his convictions very fearlessly, but they were after all his own convictions, gleaned from his own study of the case, and he carefully weighted the two sides he knew every subject possessed. He never accepted opinions ready made, and very frequently he was perhaps unorthodox. But, strong as his convictions were, he took it as natural that others might not always see eye to eye with him, and recognised that point of view might largely be dictated by circumstances. It is true to say that he touched life at a great many points, and always to the advantage of those with whom he was associated. I think it would be true to say, as Pope said in another connection,

*He was a friend to truth, of soul sincere,
In action faithful, and in honour clear,
Who broke no promise, served no private end,
Who gained no title, and who lost no friend."*

His fellow journalists were unanimous in their praise and respect as shown by the following tribute by a columnist of "The Citizen", a daily paper:-

"In addition to the many public and quasi-public positions which the late Mr. Scotford Harmer, of Cirencester, held with so much distinction in his latter years, there was one characteristic of his younger days which gave him deserved prominence as a journalist. Scot Harmer, as he was known to his intimates, was, an exceedingly efficient reporter of the old school, and his conspicuous reliability as a note-taker gained for him the confidence and respect of many leading politicians and other public Speakers. Among these was Sir Michael Hicks Beach (afterwards Earl St. Aldwyn), who could successfully be 'approached' by Mr. Harmer when other journalists could not always secure an interview with him.

One instance when Scot was particularly pleased at having induced the then Chancellor of the Exchequer to dictate to him a report of his speech in advance in order that it might be got on the wires before the telegraph office closed. I had reason to recollect the courteous assistance which Sir Michael rendered to the Press on that occasion because I was doing a report for "The Times", and Mr. Harmer, as was characteristic of him, shared the advance 'copy' with me."

Joyce Sleet (nee Harmer) remembers the kindness of her uncle, Scotford Harmer, he used to send her family, who were then living in London, a copy of the newspaper each week, and every Christmas he sent money to buy a few extras as her mother was a widow with two children to support, at the time of the Depression. Apparently there was a great family likeness, both Joyce's father and brother bearing a striking resemblance to Scotford. Peter Scotford Harmer, grandson of Scotford Harmer, and father of our member Sally Ann Harmer (see tree on page 2), also worked for a time on the paper.

The association of the Harmer family with the paper did not end with Scotford's death. Ownership of the Cirencester Newspaper Company Limited passed to his three children, Russell, Ronald and Marjorie, and with Thomas Boulton as a fellow director responsible for on the spot management they continued in this capacity. During the Second World War, Ronald, who had been News Editor of the "Observer" (national newspaper), gave up this position, purchased the interests in the Company of his brother and sister and took over active management of The Cirencester Newspaper Company Limited. His Fleet Street experience proved of immense value to the Standard during the War and immediate post-war years, but unfortunately his health failed and he was forced to relinquish the work. Ronald Harmer sold the business in 1950 to a well known Cirencester family and thus the Harmer connection was severed.

